A

SERMON,

DELIVERED AT MASON, APRIL 11, 1803,

AT THE FUNERAL OF

MISS PERSIS LAWRENCE,

DAUGHTER OF

MR. STEPHEN LAWRENCE,

Aged 23 Years.

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A

FUNERAL SERMON.

ECCLESIASTES viii. 8.

——*There is no discharge in that war.*

THE inspired penman is here speaking of death, that great change we all must undergo. Saith he, "there is no man who hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war, neither shall wickedness deliver those who are given to it." To pass the change by death is, with propriety, called a war. Death is the king of terrors—the last enemy that shall be destroyed; and to die is to meet this enemy, and be overcome of him. O how painful—how distressing is the conflict! Though, through him who has led captivity captive, death becomes to the humble, believing soul, a release from the prison of clay, and freedom from all future sorrow and sighing—though to him the curse be turned into a blessing, and death be an introduction to complete and everlasting felicity; yet nature recoils at death, and shudders to pass the dark and

gloomy valley. How much more dreadful must it be to meet this king of terrors, unsupported by any comforting and animating hopes beyond the grave! Yet this is a lot from which no characters or conditions of mankind are exempted. All who breathe the breath of life must die. All earthly glory must be prostrated in the dust.

Our text is an "allusion to an institution enjoined upon the Jews, in which, upon their preparation "for battle, the officers were directed to proclaim, "that if any one had built an house, and not dedicated it,—had planted a vineyard, and not eaten "of it,—had betrothed a wife, and not taken her,— "or, if any were fearful, and faint-hearted, they "should retire from the battle. But in this war "there is no discharge. They who have spent their "lives in anxious care to obtain the comforts and "conveniencies of life, and begin to rejoice in their "goods laid up for many years; they who have "builded houses, planted vineyards, and formed "connections, from which they entertain the most "pleasing prospects, are no less exposed to the arrests "of death. Nor can any terrifying apprehensions "excuse us from meeting the king of terrors. In "vain does the distressed soul turn from the sight "of this dreaded foe; in vain does she look to sympathizing friends, or to medical aid for relief.—In "this war there is no discharge."

The text, together with the solemn occasion of our assembling this day, lead us to contemplate death as the common lot of mankind.—To consider what it is which renders death thus dreadful.—To see the importance of preparation for death, and hence to inquire, what is implied in being prepared.

First. We are led to contemplate death as the common lot of humanity; and hence to bring home to ourselves, the solemnizing thought, that we may feel there is such a war before us.

It is a truth which no one in his sober senses, presumes to deny, that all who live must one day be numbered with the dead; though, alas! it is too often the unhappy case, the day of their own death is viewed at a great distance. Mankind see one generation pass away, as another cometh—see their fellow creatures, their intimate acquaintances and dear connexions drop off around them, many much younger than themselves, not unfrequently in a sudden and unexpected moment; and yet are apt to count many years for themselves. But O vain mortals! God has commissioned his servants to cry, and sound it in your ears, "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field."* Our life is a vapour; and the events of a day—of an hour, are unknown. "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?" But the number of his days is with God, and not with himself. The uncertainty of life is strikingly represented in the language of Job, "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure."† Though we enjoy health, and are free from all symptoms of approaching death, it is by no means certain that the fatal messenger is not now at the door. We are apt to view all as mortal, but ourselves. Yet, when we follow the remains of a friend, or acquaintance, to the place of silence, we

* Isa. xl. 6. † Job. xxi. 23.

know not which of us shall be the next victim of the conquering foe. But though years may roll away before we are called hence, and many fall on our right, and on our left, yet the time must arrive, when the places which now know us, shall know us no more forever. Death was denounced as the consequence of sin; and "death hath reigned upon all men, for that all have sinned." The grave is the house appointed for all the living. Every twinge of pain,—every indisposition of body we feel, is a solemn premonition of the approaching foe; and speaks to the attentive mind, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This plain, and constantly demonstrated truth, would not need to be brought into view, and urged upon the attention by the messengers of God, were there not a strong propensity in mankind to banish the solemn scene from their thoughts. But did each one realize on what slippery places their feet stand, we should be ready to adopt the language of David to his friend, and say, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.*

And as it is appointed unto all men once to die, it is well for us to consider,

Secondly, What it is which renders death so dreadful. That it is the dread of all the living, needs no formal proof. It is seen, it is felt to be a dread. Even the Psalmist speaks of the *terrors* of death being fallen upon him.†

Here I would observe, in the first place, The change which death produces in these bodies, which are so wonderfully made, and curiously wrought, is

* I. Sam. xx. 3. † Ps. lv. 4.

not without its effect to render it dreadful. Who is there, who has not seen "the horrid features of death" stamped on the once lovely and pleasing countenance of a dear friend, or relation? To contemplate such a change in their own bodies,—to realize them as becoming a putrid and loathsome mass, disgusting to the nearest friend, is something which strikes the feelings of nature with painful sensations. And especially must it, when this frail body has been the chief object of attention; and the care, which ought to have been applied to the precious soul, has been wasted, to adorn and beautify the fading dust.

Again. The change which death produces in all the relations we sustain, and connexions we have formed, carries with it a certain degree of dread. Where the affections are cemented in the endearing relations of husband and wife, parent and child,—or, where the most tender attachments are formed, the thought of separation is painful; and frequently, not a little trial to those who hope to meet again, where there shall be no more death.

Let me add, The thought of undergoing the operation of death, most commonly fills the mind with dread, even where there is a comfortable hope beyond the grave. 'Tis something to which all must be strangers, till their own time arrives. The living cannot know what it is to die: and nature shudders at the pains, the groans, the dying strife. O ye who have seen the agonies of death in others, how must you tremble to pass through the same!

But however shocking the change which death produces in our bodies,—however affecting the

change in connexions, and temporal concerns,—however terrifying the pangs of dissolving nature, yet these are not the STING of death.

THE soul does, and must feel its own immortality; and must look to an hereafter—a new, an untried state of being. And as "death is the wages of sin," and the word of inspiration sounds in the ears of dying mortals, "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil,"* while reason assents to the fitness of it, and conscience testifies to guilt, it is sin which gives death his sting, and in a peculiar manner arms him with terrors—it is this which makes it such a fearful thing to die. Oh! to meet God—to stand in his presence—to have all our sins laid open to view—no further offers of mercy made to the guilty impenitent—no further day of grace!—This full conviction, or distressing fear makes the day of death a dreadful day, to all who have not a hope of free pardon, through the merits and righteousness of Jesus Christ—to all who have not seen their wretched state, as rebels against God, and have not been brought to lay down the weapons of their rebellion, and become reconciled to him—to all who have not fled as a bird from the snare of the fowler, to Jesus Christ, as the only hope. However unconcerned they may have been, when death comes to them, they have not only the trials common to all, but, being without hope, "how are they suddenly brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors."† How dreadful must it be to him to die, whose pursuits have been after lying vanities—whose heart is still set upon the world!

* Eccl. xii. 14. † Ps. lxxiii. 19.

He knows no other good, and has no other treasure, than the wealth he must leave behind him forever. Every enjoyment is taken away. He is torn from the endearments of life. Instead of support under his sufferings, he endures the pangs of a guilty conscience, accusing him of having had and wasted a precious day of grace—having despised the richest offers of divine mercy, bartered eternal life for momentary gratifications, and spent his time in heaping up riches which cannot profit in the day of wrath. Instead of bright and glorious prospects, and animating hopes, such have nothing before them, but fearful expectations of wrath.

And since in this war there is no discharge, what praise is due to God, that through the riches of his grace, abounding in Jesus Christ, this is not the wretched case of all, in suffering the pains of death; but some happy souls are found, who, in the distressing hour can say, "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?" To some the change by death is glorious and happy; and in the painful conflict, they are more than conquerors.

Therefore, since a glorious victory may be obtained in this war, which cannot be avoided, we may see the importance of being prepared for death; and hence earnestly to inquire, what is implied in preparation for death? according as was proposed in the

Third place. No more is needed to carry conviction, to every mind inclined to receive instruction, of the importance of being prepared for death, than to admit, and seriously consider these things, viz. There is a war before us in which there is no discharge. The time when we shall be called to the

dread encounter is, to us, most uncertain. There is a way in which a victory may be obtained, and the change produced by death will be glorious and happy. But unless prepared for death in this short and uncertain space of time, while life lasts, there can be no hope for eternity. While the word of God declares, "Now is the accepted time—now is the day of salvation," it as plainly teaches that destruction without remedy shall overtake those who harden themselves under divine reproof,* and refuse to hear the gracious calls of the gospel.

But while the importance of being prepared for death appears from these considerations, the inquiry remains, what is implied in this preparation?

In few words it is answered: It implies that we have a right to, and are qualified for the enjoyment of the kingdom and presence of God. In his favor, and in this alone, is life. And we may see what is necessary to give a right to, and qualify for the heavenly world, if we consider,

1st, That we are all sinners, and as sinners are obnoxious to the wrath of God, we have forfeited all favour, and merited evil. But God, of his infinite mercy and grace, has been pleased to send his Son to be the propitiation for sin; and there is no other way than by Christ, nor other name than the name of Christ, by which we must, or can be saved. Jesus Christ has made his appearance in this world to make atonement for sin; he hath wrought out and brought in an everlasting righteousness, and shed his precious blood for the remission of sin. But though "he was wounded for our trans-

* Prov. xxix. 1.

gression and bruised for our iniquities,"—though he is exalted to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sin,—though in him there is an abundant fulness of merit to justify the chief of sinners, and for his sake God manifests himself a God forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and the sceptre of mercy is held out to all returning penitents; yet none are savingly benefited by him, except they believe in him. Jesus himself hath said, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* Hence, it is faith in Jesus Christ which justifies the sinner. Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to them who believe."† "He who believeth on him is not condemned: but he who believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."‡ And as faith in the son of God justifies from sin, so it is faith which gives a right to the heavenly inheritance. We can have no right to the kingdom of God, but a covenant right: but faith in Jesus Christ brings into a covenant relation to God. For to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on his name.‖ "And if children, then heirs."

2dly. Let it be considered, that God is an holy being, and heaven a place of holiness; and it is equally plain that the necessity of regeneration is implied in being prepared for death. Without holy affections, and a relish for divine employments and enjoyments, the soul could not be happy in the presence of God, and in the society of holy beings. "Without holiness no one shall see the Lord." And as "we are by nature children of wrath even as oth-

* John viii. 24. † Rom. x. 4. ‡ John iii. 18. ‖ John i. 12.

ers,"* we must be born again. The natural opposition of the heart to God must be taken away,—the power of sin broken,—the love of sin overcome; there must be a longing desire after complete deliverance from moral pollution—after moral conformity to God. Hence, whoever is prepared for death, has seen sin to be "exceeding sinful"—has seen himself to be vile, and justly condemned—has been brought to loathe and abhor himself, and thus feeling his poverty and wretchedness, has committed himself into the hands of God, hoping and trusting alone in the merits of the divine Redeemer. His will is bowed, his heart is changed.

Where this is the happy case, while they put their humble trust in Christ as their Redeemer, they feel safe in being found in him, not having on their own righteousness; and instead of contending against divine sovereignty, they are pleased with the scheme of salvation by grace. They find in their heart a desire to glorify God—a delight to do his will. They are weaned from the world, so far that earthly objects, which once captivated their affections, no longer appear the greatest good. The mind is engaged in sublimer pursuits, and seeking a different treasure. The heart expands in love to all—in desires after God, and in good will to men. In short, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."

And is not this real preparation for death? For where, by the renewing and sanctifying influences of the spirit of God, heavenly desires, and a relish for spiritual enjoyments are implanted in the soul, and the love of the world is conquered, it cannot be

* Eph. ii. 3.

greatly painful to take an everlasting farewell of the things of time and sense. Where sin is forgiven, and there is a comfortable evidence of free pardon in the blood of Christ, the fear and dread of future suffering is done away. It is a sense of unpardoned guilt which makes it such a fearful thing to die. Where there is cordial reconciliation to the divine character and government, and the soul is humbled before God, their will bows in sweet submission to his will. Even as to the time of their departure, they are satisfied his time is the best; and though nature shrinks back from the conflict, grace prevails to say, "Father, not my will, but thine be done." And where the hope the gospel inspires, is realized, the prospect of a glorious resurrection, when these vile bodies shall be raised, and made like unto Christ's own glorious body, reconciles to the disgusting change this mortal frame must undergo; and the prospect of complete deliverance from sin, and of being forever with the Lord, excites desires after deliverance from the body, as from a prison which keeps them from the object of their love. In this happy frame, it is felt, "to die is gain."

It now remains to make some practical Improvement.

The solemn occasion on which we are assembled, and the interesting subject we have been contemplating, forcibly present to our view, fellow mortals, our own case, and should bring us, as in a glass, to behold our picture, as frail dying creatures. We see the triumphs of death over our race; and should learn, not only that we must *soon*, but that we know not *how soon*, be numbered with the dead. We see one cut off in the bloom of youth, and pride of strength;

and whose turn will be next is known only to God, with whom is the number of our days. All we know with respect to this, is, *there is no discharge in that war;* yet if we are disposed to attend to the voice of God, in his word and providence, we must learn the importance of immediate preparation for death, and the danger of delaying a moment, before we acquaint ourselves with him, and be at peace. All flesh is grass—all the goodliness, glory and strength of man, as the flower of the field. That which is fair and flourishing in the morning, may be cut down and withered before noon. So frail—so uncertain is human life!

MY YOUNG FRIENDS IN PARTICULAR.

CAN you feel safe and free from danger, while unreconciled to God? Can you reckon on long years of pleasure yet to come? Because you are now free from racking pain, or symptoms of disease, is it certain that your mountain stands strong? O, cast your eyes into that coffin, and you may see that which will be instead of a thousand witnesses to testify against such vain presumption! There is demonstration. Had not your companion—your acquaintance, whose pallid corpse, with silent, though impressive eloquence, addresseth you, a few months past, as fair a prospect of length of days as any one of you can have? Could flattering prospects in life—strong and tender attachments formed; could the anxious solicitude and kind attention of parents and friends, or medical assistance, avert the stroke of death, we should not have been here this day, to mingle our sympathetic tears with theirs who mourn. May this solemn sight serve to bring eternal things realizingly to your view; and bring you to inquire, as in the presence of your judge, whether you are prepared to obey the summons of

death. Ask yourselves, are we now ready, thus early in life, to bid farewel to all below, and stand before our Judge? O, remember, when death is commissioned he will not ask if you are ready. Dare not give sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, while you are estranged from God.

This occasion and subject should bring each one, old as well as young, to a serious inquiry, what must be the effect of such a change in them—what hope they have beyond the grave. At the same time our subject teacheth us where we are to look for evidence in determining this important point, viz. into our heart. Let us be critical and faithful in this inquiry, and ask, Have we ever been brought to see ourselves sinners, exposed to and justly deserving divine wrath? Have we, feeling our poverty and wretchedness, submitted ourselves to God, and fled to his grace in Jesus Christ, as our only hope? Is Christ precious to us as our hope, and the object of our ardent desire? Is Christ precious to us as a saviour from *sin*, as well as a saviour from *wrath?* Is our heart taken off from the world, and sinful pleasures, and set in us to attain conformity to God, and the enjoyment of him as our happiness? Are we willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ? In one word, are we born of God—become new creatures in Christ Jesus? Candidates for eternity, delay not another hour before you determine in yourselves, this important point. In proportion to the strength and clearness of the evidence that this is our case, will be the strength of our hope, that to die would be to us a glorious and happy change.

THE numerous mourners on this solemn occasion have a claim to our particular attention. This day you see the surprising change death makes in these earthly tabernacles; and to you a voice, solemn as the grave, is addressed, *Prepare for that war, in which there is no discharge.*

WITH tender emotions we turn to the particular friend of the deceased.

DEAR SIR,

YOU are called to a sore and heavy trial. Your prospects are soon clouded over. Your joyful expectations are turned into mourning. The object of your warmest earthly affection—the desire of your eyes is gone, not to return till the heavens be no more. This day you may say in the language of the Psalmist, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." You will remember, it is God, and not man, who has smitten you. He has not only a sovereign right to dispose all events according to his own will, but his dealings with his creatures are effects of infinite wisdom and perfect rectitude. God is wise in all his ways, and holy in all his works. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Even the most afflictive dispensations of providence, are not without their salutary purpose. May you so profit under this peculiar trial, that your heart may be turned to "sing of mercy and of judgment." In a solemn manner God is teaching you the most important lesson. How plainly does this sad reverse of things speak, in the language of inspiration, attended with demonstrative evidence, "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" Hereby you are

taught that man at his best estate is altogether vanity; and the most promising appearances of joy and happiness, in this world, are delusive and uncertain! You are called to bear the yoke in your youth; may you find it good for you to bear it—good for you to be afflicted. Crossed and disappointed in your expectations here, O seek that comfort and happiness which no outward changes can destroy. Your earthly friend is gone. O seek that friend who will never forsake you—who sticketh closer than a brother. Submit yourself under the chastening of the Almighty. May this affecting scene impress on your mind such a feeling sense of the shortness and uncertainty of human life, that you may give all diligence to be prepared for your own departure. Remember, *there is no discharge in this war.*

MOURNING PARENTS,

THIS day you are called to a new kind of trial. Painful and afflictive is the scene. Great is the breach made in your family. A dutiful and affectionate child is taken from you. While you were fondly anticipating her future usefulness, and the comfort you might enjoy in your declining years, in seeing her agreeably settled in the world, how are your expectations cut off!

WHILE you are ready to say in the words of a man of affliction of old, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me;" remember it is the Lord who hath done it. It is his hand which is upon you. He hath wounded you, and he alone can heal. To him should you repair in the day of trouble. God, in his righteous government, has taken from you a de-

sirable child; but his right was prior to yours. He hath done you no wrong. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; and may you in your affliction, bless his holy name. This should bring you to humble yourselves under his mighty hand;—to be still and know that he is God. A humble submissive temper takes off the sharp edge of affliction, and mingles sweetness in the bitter cup.

In this solemn and instructive dispensation of providence you are feelingly taught the uncertain continuance of the most desirable temporal comforts and enjoyments, and the vanity of the world, especially while any set their affections on it, and make that the object of their pursuit. The only durable treasure must be laid up in heaven.

This affliction, which you so sensibly feel, should remind you of your own mortality. 'Tis the voice of God to you, "Be ye also ready." Your daughter shall no more return to you, but you must go to her. She is gone before you, but you are hastening to the house appointed for all the living. O how should you search your heart, be quickened to duty, and stand in constant expectation of that day and hour of which no man knows. May you find this mournful scene as profitable as it is painful, and lay to heart that *there is no discharge in that war.*

BRETHREN AND SISTERS OF THE DECEASED,

To you this is a day of sadness. This day you see your happy circle broken—your number lessened. You mourn the loss of a much loved sister, whose remains are soon to be committed to the silent grave. With painful sensations you have watch-

ed the progress of the fatal disease: and while you have stood round her bed from day to day, anxious to administer to her relief, you have witnessed the sighs, the groans, the pangs of dissolving nature. You see the change which death makes in this mortal body, and in all the connexions and circumstances of life. And O how great the change! The sparkling eye has lost its lustre and vivacity; the lips are locked in silence; the active limbs cease to move; and all the earthly relations which once existed, are ceased in death. Behold as in a glass, the features of your own mortal likeness. Learn, O learn from what you see and feel, this truth, that as you were from the dust, so to the dust you must return. Let not the cares nor vanities of the world erase the solemn impression from your mind; but habitually view yourselves as dying creatures. Never forget, *there is no discharge in this war.*

You have the most convincing proof that no attention of friends, nor tender attachments to life, nor even the bloom of youth, can secure againſt the arrests of death, or prolong the life of those friends in whom you delight. O "cease then from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." Let not your dependance be on creatures, nor your heart on created good. Neglect not to inquire, and attend to the answer of your conscience, what must have been your case, had the messenger of death been sent to you instead of your sister. Or what must be your case, were you now called into the presence of God. Flatter not yourselves, because your sister had so long warning of the approaching foe, that you are certain of months and weeks to prepare for this war. You

have no security, though you rise in the morning in perfect health, that your eyes shall not, before night, be closed in death. O think not that you are free from danger till you are prepared to die—till you are reconciled to God—till Christ has become your refuge. Religion is the "one thing needful." Religion will support you under realizing views of your own dissolution, and yield consolation under the loss of dearest friends.

THIS assembly will indulge me a word further before I close.

WHAT you have seen and heard this day, is the voice of God to you individually. Will you not be convinced that there is a *war* before you, *in which there is no discharge?* Will you not realize that your days are few and uncertain?

SINNERS, fear and tremble. You have cause to fear. The threatenings of God are against you; and the day of his patience is not a day without end. "He who, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." While you continue in a state of rebellion against God, destruction and misery are in your ways, and the ways of peace you know not. Your feet stand on slippery places, and a moment's delay is at infinite hazard.

CHRISTIANS, you are hereby solemnly admonished to see that you stand with your loins girded, and your feet shod, and be as those who wait for the coming of their Lord: for in such an hour as you think not, you may be called into his presence.